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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# Intelligence Memorandum

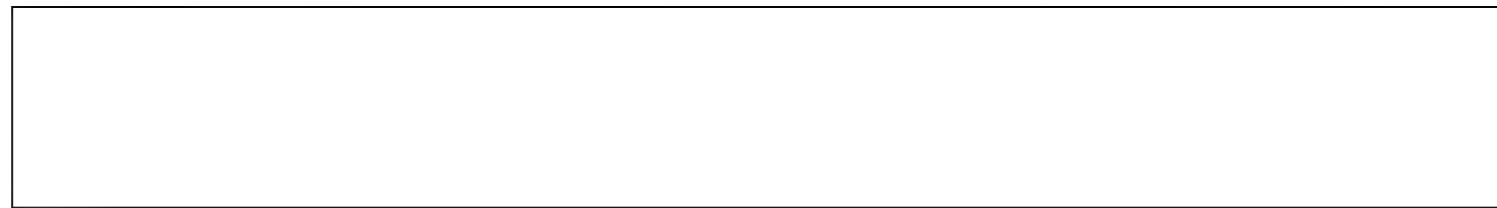
## *The Situation in East Pakistan*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
12 October 1971

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in East Pakistan

Introduction

On 25 March 1971, President Mohammad Yahya Khan ordered army units in East Bengal, the country's eastern wing, to "do their duty" and "restore the authority of the government" in the province. Civil war resulted, leaving a residue of bitterness that will not be easily dissipated.

Yahya maintained that he acted in defense of national sovereignty to thwart a plot by the Awami League--the East Pakistani political party led by the charismatic Bengali Sheik Mujibur Rahman--to proclaim an independent republic of Bangla Desh. The Awami Leaguers asserted that autonomy within the existing governmental structure, not independence, was their goal.

In the early stages of the military crackdown, the army, composed mainly of West Pakistani troops, focused primarily on soldiers and police recruited from among the Bengalis of East Pakistan and the Awami Leaguers. Later the military wrath was turned on Bengalis in general and the Hindu minority\* in

\*Hindus were apparently attacked because they were associated with India, which was thought to be responsible for the Bengali "uprising." There were approximately 10 million Hindus in a total East Pakistan population of 75 million on 25 March.

Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated within CIA.

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particular. The Bengalis retaliated against the Moslem Biharis, the non-Bengali minority group, many of whom had emigrated from India's Bihar state at the time of partition of the subcontinent. The Biharis, who tended to support the central government, were encouraged by the authorities to attack rebel Bengalis. A rag-tag Bengali military force was hurriedly organized from among Bengalis previously in the army or police, but it was no match for the regular army advance. Within a period of weeks the entire province was in the hands of West Pakistani troops, and repressive acts against the civilian population led to a massive exodus of Bengalis--particularly Hindus--into India. Over nine million refugees have now made their way across the border, and, although the flow has decreased from a high of 100,000 a day, an atmosphere of fear persists and refugees--still primarily Hindus--continue to cross the border at the rate of around 30,000 a day.

The arrival of the refugees brought Indo-Pakistani relations to a new low. India has threatened to take unspecified "unilateral action" unless the flow ceases and the Bengalis can safely return to their homes in East Pakistan. The Indians maintain that a political solution must be reached through negotiations between Islamabad and East Pakistan's elected leaders--most of whom belong to Sheik Mujib's banned Awami League and hold positions in the secessionist Bengali government set up on Indian soil near Calcutta. Since the Indians still imply that a stable East Pakistan is the sine qua non for peaceful relations between New Delhi and Islamabad, an examination of internal conditions in East Bengal (and Indian perceptions thereof) can provide some insight both as to the future of Pakistan and the likelihood of war or peace between the two South Asian powers.

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Yahya's Early Moves

1. The day after President Yahya sent the army into action in East Pakistan, stringent new martial law regulations were proclaimed in the East wing. The orders, issued under the writ of martial law administrator Lieutenant General Tikka Khan, banned all political activity, outlawed the Awami League, made the carrying of weapons illegal, and ordered an end to a three-week Bengali boycott of central government activities. The same day Yahya reinforced the martial law with a speech justifying the military intervention, branding Sheik Mujib a traitor and the Awami League a traitorous organization.

2. Yahya, nevertheless, asserted that he would transfer power to the "elected representatives of the people" as soon as possible, moving forward when law and order were again established toward that "cherished goal." How this was to be accomplished was left vague. In the national elections held beginning last December, the Awami League won 167 of the 169 National Assembly seats elected from East Pakistan--a majority in the 313-member assembly-- and 288 of the 300 East Pakistani Provincial Assembly seats. After Yahya had banned the League and branded some of its members traitors, it was difficult to envisage how he could transfer power to the "people's representatives."

3. Indeed, for several weeks no attempt was made to outline a political program that might be acceptable to the Bengali people. Instead, Islamabad seemed determined to bludgeon them into submission, and at least several thousand Bengalis are believed to have been killed. Sheik Mujib was arrested on 26 March, and one month later reports surfaced that he would be tried for treason. The funds of the Awami League were frozen, and the systematic effort to seek out and arrest League members continued. The Australian high commissioner in Islamabad warned his government that the martial law administration was destroying the League and thus removing the one element that had the popular support to act as a stabilizing force in East Pakistan. Moreover, Mujib's immense prestige and charismatic

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appeal make him perhaps the one person capable of accepting on behalf of his people a workable political compromise for the future of East Pakistan.

4. The Awami League's spectacular success in the December elections had all but eliminated other parties from the political map in East Pakistan. With the banning of the League, these parties--notably the three separate Muslim Leagues and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) led by the ambitious West Pakistani politician, Z.A. Bhutto--have attempted to take over. They have little grass-roots support in the East, however, and despite the government's encouragement and its preference for dealing with them, they appear more adept at quarreling with each other than at winning political support from among the backers of the outlawed Awami League.

5. In the early stages of the fighting, the army gained control of Dacca, the capital of East Pakistan, but only after over half the population had fled the city. By 8 April all other major cities were under military control. The Bengali secessionists held sway in the countryside, however, and several large areas flew the new flag of Bangla Desh. Normal economic activity almost completely ceased throughout the province.

6. Tikka Khan was sworn in as governor of East Pakistan on 9 April. His first message, broadcast on the 18th, was an appeal to those who "wished Pakistan well" to return to their normal duties or "be destroyed completely." The governor made derogatory reference to the "defunct" Awami League, but added that its "destructive course" had been plotted by a vocal, violent, and aggressive minority. The implication was that a member of the League need only to disprove his membership in the minority group to become acceptable to the government. Presumably, a future Bengali government in East Pakistan might be manned, at least in part, by repentant Awami Leaguers. What has occurred since Yahya laid down the broad outline of his East Pakistan policy--denouncing and punishing activist members of the Awami League and other "extremists" while ostensibly seeking the cooperation

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of the rest of the population in the province--has been an effort to fill in the blanks and make the program work.

Bengali and Foreign Reaction

7. Few members of the Awami League showed any interest in testing the government's implied amnesty. As of 10 May, only three of the previously elected representatives had come forward. Most of the notable members of the smaller parties in East Pakistan whom the President had approached to work with his government were also refusing to cooperate. A purge of East Pakistani civil service officers reduced the availability of Bengali administrative talent, and on 22 May, Yahya, who appears to have consistently underestimated the Bengali will to resist, admitted that it would take longer than he had first anticipated to transfer power to a civilian government.

8. The Bengali insurgents, although continuing to lose in direct encounters with the army, were nevertheless building up their forces. Moreover, New Delhi, presumably hoping to ensure that an independent Bangla Desh would have no reason to doubt Indian good will, moved quickly to help.

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Army retaliation reduced active cooperation by the peasants with the guerrilla fighters, but few guerrillas were betrayed to the martial law authorities and the insurgents continued to receive at least passive civilian support. Throughout May, Bengali resistance to the martial law administration remained determined, although largely ineffective.

9. In the meantime, the Indians were voicing their mounting alarm over the continuing and growing refugee influx. New Delhi's efforts to dramatize the economic and social burdens that war in Pakistan thrust upon India (aided by refugee atrocity reports in the Western press) were succeeding both in gaining worldwide sympathy for New Delhi and in giving Islamabad a bad international press.

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10. Yahya, however, conceived his main mission to be the preservation of national unity. Bengal had to be pacified before progress toward a civilian government could occur, and this could hardly be expected to improve the government's image or to stem the refugee flow. Nevertheless, in part at least to stall off possible war plans in India and to avoid antagonizing potential aid donors, Yahya made some gestures to placate his critics.

11. In mid-May, he sent a letter to the UN secretary general asking for help in drawing up a relief program and in coordinating relief efforts. The slow pace of the UN administrative machinery could be counted on to give the President plenty of time to continue his pacification program in Bengal. On 21 May, Yahya broadcast an appeal for all bona fide Pakistani citizens "who have committed no crime" to return to their homes. These citizens were advised not to listen to false propaganda and to rest assured that law and order had been restored in East Pakistan. Because the military would determine who had and who had not committed crimes, very few refugees answered the call. Possibly, Yahya had not intended them to.

12. [redacted] as of 27 May, the government was still seeking to force Hindus and senior officials of the Awami League to leave East Pakistan. Hindu residents were adjudged a permanent threat to security and apparently until that threat was reduced, i.e., until a sufficient number of Hindus had left the country, the government's repressive policy was to continue.

13. [redacted]

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[redacted] Five other important Awami League leaders, including Tajuddin Ahmed, the prime minister of the Bangla Desh government in exile, were, according to the press, tried in absentia and sentenced to 14 years in

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prison. The government also began drawing up a list of Awami League members who had successfully undergone a screening process and were now "cleared" to participate in a new civilian government. A large number of these people had already escaped to India, and the government's attempts to cajole or cudgel those remaining in East Pakistan into co-operating met with indifferent results.

14. On 24 May Yahya found it necessary to make another bid for Bengali support. He again made an amnesty offer, specifying that those who had not committed crimes prior to their flight would be permitted to return. He noted that it was no crime to have once been identified with "Bangla Desh," which was simply a term for a region of Pakistan like the Punjab or Baluchistan. This was the President's most forthcoming statement up to that date. He added, however, that returning refugees would undergo a government check, and it is doubtful that he anticipated that many Hindus would submit themselves to another government "sorting out." Indeed, refugees continued to flee into India at increasing rates, and to ensure their permanent departure, the government began offering "abandoned" Hindu land free to any tribesmen in West Pakistan who wished to settle in the East wing. Shops and other property belonging to departed Hindus were also reportedly distributed to deserving Biharis and non-Hindu Bengalis who cooperated with the regime.

15. The situation had stabilized enough by 24 May that Yahya felt secure in welcoming foreign journalists back into the East wing, but on 25 May the US consul in Dacca reported that Bengali resistance was continuing and that law and order was again deteriorating.

Islamabad Tries to Consolidate Power

16. The month of June marked a period of determined effort to consolidate the central government's physical hold on East Pakistan and to establish a mechanism whereby a civilian government, loyal to

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Islamabad, could be created. During this period, the army continued to concentrate on the Hindu community, while the government made another effort to refute charges that it was guilty of persecuting Hindus.

17. On the political front the government met with little success. Martial law administrator Tikka Khan announced the formation of local "peace committees"--civilian liaison bodies with top-level access to the military establishment. These committees were touted as mechanisms through which the people could express their wishes. Because they were staffed primarily with Muslims, however, in practice they became adjuncts to the government's anti-Hindu campaign; they also provided a means by which loyal East Pakistanis could be identified and groomed for positions in the new administrative order. "Peace committee" members were generally feared and hated as quislings. Many became targets for assassination squads of the Mutki Bahini (the Bengali name for the guerrilla force).

18. Awami Leaguers in Calcutta had established the exile government of Bangla Desh on 14 April. On 7 June, Syed Nazrul Islam, the acting president (Mujib had been appointed president-in-absentia) set forth the conditions for a political settlement with Islamabad: Mujib, along with all other political prisoners, was to be released unconditionally; the Pakistani Army was to withdraw from the East wing; and Islamabad was to recognize the government of Bangla Desh and pay reparations for damages inflicted since 25 March. These demands were unacceptable to Islamabad. No attempt to negotiate took place, and Yahya's preoccupation with pacifying the province continued. Although both sides have since expressed some willingness to move toward negotiations, no significant progress has been made.

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[Redacted] On 14 June Tikka Khan gave a press conference announcing that 21 refugee reception

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centers were to be established along the border with India and that 8,000-10,000 East Pakistanis had already returned. Tikka Khan discounted the Indian figure of 5,500,000 Pakistani refugees already in that country and said that one million was closer to the mark. Most foreign observers regarded the Indian figures as only moderately inflated and discounted the Pakistani claims.

20. On 20 June Yahya, referring primarily to Awami Leaguers who refused to cooperate with the government, termed politicians "absolutely irresponsible." At that time, however, the government planned to bring "loyal" League members into the provincial government although denying them an opportunity to participate in the central administration.

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21. Under some pressure from the international community, he again made a stab at bringing the refugees back home. Among the contrivances was a cash awards program to entice reformed secessionists home. When neither this nor other proposals were successful, Yahya on 18 June for the first time appealed to "members of the minority community" to return. He asserted that all Pakistanis, irrespective of caste, creed, and religion, should have no qualms about returning to their homes.

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23. On 28 June Yahya made a major policy speech, outlining his plans for a new constitution and an eventual transfer of power to a national civilian government. He called for by-elections to fill the East Pakistan Assembly seats that had been declared vacated. Yahya talked in terms of "about four months," but no exact timetable was set. The speech, which could hardly have been expected to cut much ice with the Bengalis, appeared to be aimed primarily at placating West Pakistani politicians--particularly Z.A. Bhutto--who were growing impatient at the delay in turning power over to the civilians. Yahya made it clear, however, that the martial law administration which had been ruling in both wings of Pakistan since March 1969, would continue in some form even after the new civilian government took over.

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*\*\* Before 25 March, the population of East Pakistan was about 75 million and that of West Pakistan 59 million.*

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Positions Harden

25. Relations with India continued to deteriorate as the summer wore on. The Indians had embarked on a fruitless diplomatic offensive in June to convince the international community to cut off aid to Pakistan until Islamabad restored a stable government in the East wing. The Indians saw little progress in East Pakistan--refugees continued to stream across the border, raising the total to seven million by the end of July--and they increased the state of their military readiness and began to strengthen their political, economic, and military ties with the Soviets. The Indian-Soviet Friendship Treaty that was signed in early August indicated New Delhi's frustration over its inability to end Yahya's heavy-handed tactics in suppressing Bengali resistance. Should the Indians be forced to opt for a "unilateral" solution to the problem, New Delhi wanted the treaty as a backstop and as insurance against Chinese intervention.

26. Yahya, meanwhile, continued to work for the political reorganization of East Pakistan. He had said that it would be a "good thing" to ban all regional parties, thereby implying that the Muslim Leagues, because of their "nationwide" appeal in an Islamic state, were in a particularly favored position to lead the people of East Pakistan. In fact, the Muslim Leagues have most of their support in the West, and all three did badly in East Pakistan in the December 1970 elections. In recent months, two of the Muslim Leagues have agreed to merge, and under Yahya's prodding the third--and most important--may go along. Z. A. Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party, which did well in West Pakistan in the last election, is attempting to expand into the East Pakistan void. Bhutto, however, has been associated in the minds of most East Pakistanis with the events leading up to the army crackdown last March and is believed to have little popular support in the province.

27. Little forward political movement occurred during July. The main event was the appointment on 15 July of A. M. Malik, a Bengali Muslim who had

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figured prominently in Pakistan's independence movement, to serve as President Yahya's special assistant for East Pakistan's displaced persons and relief and rehabilitation operations. Yahya touted Malik's appointment as evidence that he considered the situation stable enough to begin giving responsibility back to civilians, but Malik was largely written off in East Pakistan and India as a "tame Bengali" and an old man with little force and exercising little authority. Yahya said that although he was considering Malik as a possible future governor for East Pakistan, the time for such an appointment was not yet propitious. Malik, himself, had been reluctant to take the refugee job, fearing that he would become a target of Mukti Bahini reprisals.

28. The fact that Malik's appointment was window-dressing is revealed by the climbing refugee totals

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Moreover, the government admitted that it was reluctant to guarantee the restoration of property that had already been turned over to Bengali Muslims and Biharis to returning refugees.

29. Although by the end of June several "cleared" Bengalis were appointed to administrative positions in East Pakistan, the government's effort to attract collaborators was still not going well in July. The appointment of additional civilian staff members was reportedly being considered, but the list of former Bengali civil service officials suspected of supporting the Awami League ran into the hundreds, which meant that Bengali bureaucratic talent would be hard to obtain.

30. Pacification remained the main thrust of Islamabad's efforts. Although loyal Bengali and Bihari militia groups (Razakars) were recruited to aid in maintaining law and order, the guerrillas were becoming more effective and the risks of collaboration more apparent. Yahya had announced plans to visit East Pakistan in early August, but the security situation apparently has been so uncertain that he still has not gone.

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31. On 1 August the Pakistani Government announced that 88 of 167 Awami League members elected after the December election to sit in the National Assembly were cleared to take their seats. An announcement that 94 of the 288 Awami Leaguers elected to the Provincial Assembly had also been cleared was broadcast on 19 August. The rest, 47 percent of the Awami League's National Assembly representatives and 67 percent of its Provincial Assembly representatives, were ordered to stand trial on treason and murder charges. Not surprisingly, few of the accused were expected to turn themselves in, and over half the League members on the cleared list had long since fled to India.

32. Undaunted, Yahya proceeded with his plans to turn the government over to selected civilians. By-elections for all vacant seats are scheduled to begin in December, and Relief Coordinator A. M. Malik has been appointed governor of East Pakistan, effective 3 September. Although cosmetic changes continue, meaningful political accommodation has not been forthcoming.

33. To improve its image, the government became more receptive to plans for creation of an international relief team under UN auspices to work inside East Pakistan. Actual operations still moved slowly, however. The head of the UN relief operations cited government inefficiency, disruption of inland communications and transport, passive resistance by the civilian population, and the expected growth of violence and sabotage by guerrillas as the main roadblocks.

34. In another gesture, the government billed as an "important step" its plan to allow all people whose property had been damaged during the fighting to file claims with insurance companies or with the central government. But the short deadline for lodging these claims ruled out most refugee participation, and the persecution of Hindus, although less blatant, continued throughout August and September.

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The Situation Today

35. The danger of a major conflict between India and Pakistan remains high as a result of the continuing crisis in East Pakistan. Indian military preparations have been markedly increased, and Pakistani troops have moved to forward positions along their borders. At no time since the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war has either country been in so high a state of military readiness.

36. The security situation in East Pakistan's major cities, although slipping somewhat recently, has improved since the early days of the civil war. The situation in the countryside is not yet under control and it too may be deteriorating. The guerrilla forces are becoming more effective and numerous.

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Recent attacks on shipping at the port of Chalha indicate an intensified and more sophisticated campaign.

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37. The East Pakistani people--except those in certain limited areas like the Chittagong Hill Tracts where enmity between tribals and Bengalis is of long

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standing--appear to wish the guerrillas well. The army's policy of invoking "collective responsibility" against villages suspected of aiding the guerrillas is effective in preventing active peasant collaboration in many areas, but the people are reluctant to betray the guerrillas and are often willing to provide them food. In at least one subdivision, Gopalganj in Faridpur district, the secessionists reportedly have established a civilian hierarchy parallel to the official structure.

38. The government civil service remains demoralized and inefficient. Many officials are concerned that their work is no longer relevant, and others have not yet recovered from seeing family and friends killed and property destroyed. The government's continuing policy of replacing key Bengali officers with West Pakistanis and sending displaced Bengalis to "exile" in the West wing is also demoralizing. Some officials at the district and township level are concerned that the Mukti Bahini may view them as collaborators. But most of the Bengali civil servants are privately pro - Bangla Desh, and none so far as is known has been assassinated. As a result of all these factors, government operations have virtually ceased in many areas, and the service in general is far from satisfactory.

39. The political situation has changed little over the last several months. Malik has assumed the East Pakistani governor's job and appointed an all - East Pakistani civilian cabinet. Most of the cabinet members have been fairly prominent in local politics, but only two had belonged to the banned Awami League and they are regarded as turncoats by many Bengalis. Most of the other members are from the smaller parties; several of them were badly defeated in the December races for the National Assembly. In sum, the army will maintain ultimate control, and the Bengalis know it. Yahya has appointed the army commander in the East as the new martial law administrator--a post theoretically subordinate to that of governor but actually parallel to it.

40. President Yahya issued a general amnesty on 5 September to "all those who have committed or are alleged to have committed offenses during the

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disturbances in East Pakistan from 1 March to 5 September 1971." The amnesty was to extend to personnel of the armed forces, the East Pakistan Rifles, the police, and militia. It did not apply to certain Awami League assemblymen and "other" individuals against whom criminal proceedings were already initiated. Thus amnesty for Mujib and other important members of the League was not granted. Although Yahya's announcement apparently is indicative of Islamabad's desire to create conditions for political reconciliation with East Pakistan, most Bengalis and refugees remain hostile and distrustful. And their distrust is not without evidence of justification. Although the government claimed that large numbers of prisoners were released following the amnesty, the US consul general in Dacca reported that most persons of significance remain in custody. In Chittagong, government information offices photographed the release of prisoners who were subsequently escorted back to prison. The consul has also heard one second-hand, but plausible, report that 30 Hindu families in Mymensingh town who took advantage of the amnesty to return home went on to India after their property was not given back.

41. A new constitution, drawn up by Islamabad, will eventually be submitted to the National Assembly for consideration before it is proclaimed by the executive branch, probably sometime after the by-election. Yahya plans to hold elections to fill vacant National Assembly seats on 12-23 December and Provincial Assembly seats on 18 December-7 January. Therefore, on 10 October he announced new regulations governing political activity in the country. Such activity, which had been banned since March, was now permissible, albeit under stringent control. For example, although political parties could begin campaigning for the by-elections, they could not engage in activities "prejudicial to the ideology, integrity, or security of Pakistan." Those who contravened the new regulations would be subject to fines and imprisonment. The new regulations make it difficult for any party to campaign upon a program not in harmony with Islamabad's policies, and as such, they are not likely to be greeted with much

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enthusiasm in autonomy-minded East Pakistan. Nevertheless, Yahya appears determined to follow through with his program, despite the Bengalis' anticipated widespread lack of cooperation. By scheduling elections and permitting political activity he may be attempting to forestall Indian military action or lessen foreign criticism of his East Pakistani policy.

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